

DEBATE

INDIA AND THE MULTILATERAL EXPORT CONTROL REGIMES

In his keynote address to a National Seminar on 'Strategic Export Control' held at New Delhi in April 2012, then Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai, in an important policy statement, advocated full membership for India in the four multilateral export control regimes. "While we wish to move forward in tandem on all the four regimes, our engagement with NSG is seen by observers as the most important. The logical conclusion of partnership with India is its full membership of the four multilateral regimes", he reiterated.¹

The four regimes he was referring to are: the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG); Australia Group (AG); Wassenaar Arrangement (WA); and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). He also disclosed that, by that time, "India has engaged actively with all the four regimes through outreach meetings". He added that, "from India's point of view, the main purpose and primary objective of India's enhanced and sustained engagement with these regimes is full membership."

This was a natural corollary to the historic 2005 India-United States 'Nuclear Deal' that led to the 2008 India-specific waiver in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines. This had been further reinforced by the November 2010 joint statement issued during President Obama's visit to India, that explicitly endorsed India's candidature for the four multilateral export control regimes. Since then, India has been upgrading national export control regimes, and also simultaneously informally gauging international reactions to its intention to join the four regimes.

India applied for membership of the 'Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2015, and formally joined the regime as a full member on June 27, 2016.

Earlier, on May 10, 2016, India had formally applied for membership of the NSG. In a forwarding letter to the NSG chair at the time, Argentine Ambassador Rafael Mariana Grossi, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar wrote: "The decision to seek participation in the NSG reflects India's strong support for international efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. India recognises the

important contributions to this objective made by the NSG. India's participation in the NSG would strengthen international efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons."

The June 23-24, 2016 plenary session of the NSG, held in Seoul, could not decide on the application, with China and a few other nations raising questions about 'process', and insisting on drawing up 'criteria' for non-NPT countries. An extraordinary plenary session of the NSG is likely to be held later this year to look at the basic questions raised. As per news reports, the outgoing Chair, Ambassador Grossi, has also been appointed as a "facilitator of the Chairperson to have informal consultations with the Participating Governments (PGs) in the group".

It is also believed that the Government had spared no efforts to engage with all the NSG members, specially the outliers, in a bid to convince them of India's impeccable credentials. All along, China has been opposing India's candidature, more for Geo-political reasons than on basic NSG principles and procedures. Some other members have been uncomfortable with admitting India due to various other reasons - none of which are insurmountable.

Questions have been since raised as to whether India's application was premature. Some of these include: Was it done without proper planning and consultations? Given the uncertainty of the membership, was not the one time waiver enough?

In a recent interview to a web-based journal, Ambassador Shyam Saran, who was intimately connected with the India-US Nuclear deal negotiations and the subsequent NSG waiver, recalled a similar disappointing experience even in August 2008 – at the first plenary meeting to decide on the NSG's waiver for India (when 20-30 countries were not fully in favour of the waiver) but this did not deter India from engaging even more.² He was answering a direct question as to whether India had reason to be disappointed with the fact that the recent Seoul meeting was unable to resolve this issue - or, is, what we are seeing, as the beginning of a process will eventually work out in India's favour?

An IDSA Comment of July 6, 2016 on the subject categorically states: "India's membership bid for the Nuclear Suppliers' Group was not delusional, untimely, hyped or an overreach by Prime Minister Modi, but is something that India has been working on for many years".³

Questions continue to be raised on the chances of our accession to these regimes in the face of seemingly vehement stand by China to keep us out and

whether the expected gains are worth the effort. In spite of such questions, India will continue to push towards the stated aims. How should India now proceed to achieve that stated goal?

The Indian Foreign Affairs Journal invited six experts in the field to comment on the above, and offer their recommendations on the future course of action. Their views are published in the following pages.

(The views expressed by the authors are their own, and do not reflect the views of the Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, or that of the Association of Indian Diplomats)

¹http://idsa.in/pressrelease/FullMembershipforIndiainExportControlRegimes_Mathai 2

² <http://thewire.in/46655/chinas-opposition-to-indias-nsg-membership-not-an-elemental-issue-says-shyam-saran/>

³ http://idsa.in/issuebrief/india-nsg-bid_balachandran-spandalai_060716